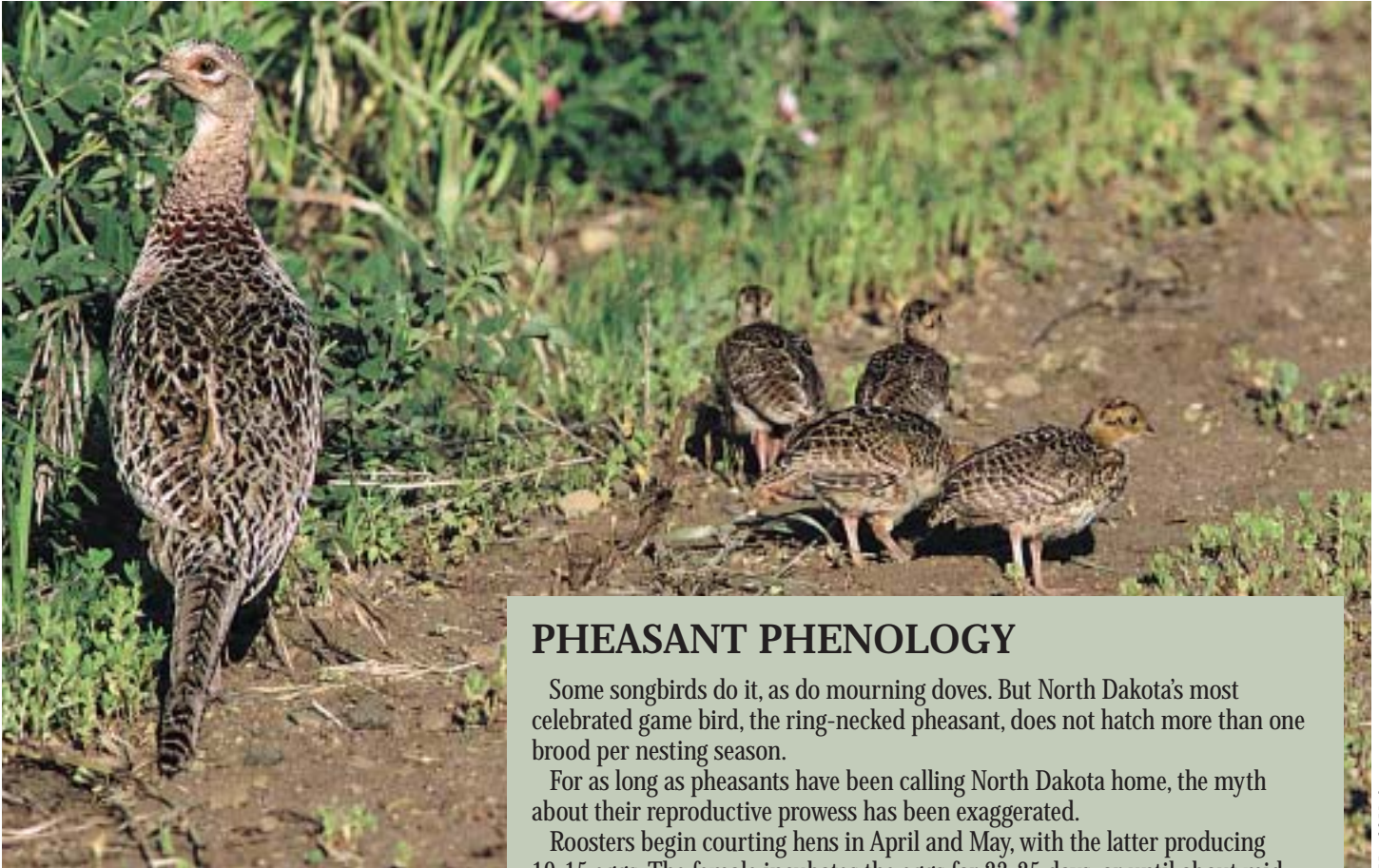


# A CLOSER LOOK



Harold Umber

## PHEASANT PHENOLOGY

Some songbirds do it, as do mourning doves. But North Dakota's most celebrated game bird, the ring-necked pheasant, does not hatch more than one brood per nesting season.

For as long as pheasants have been calling North Dakota home, the myth about their reproductive prowess has been exaggerated.

Roosters begin courting hens in April and May, with the latter producing 10-15 eggs. The female incubates the eggs for 23-25 days, or until about mid-June here on the Northern Plains. After hatching, the hen shelters her young from cool weather, storms, and the uncertainties of darkness.

During incubation, if the female loses her eggs to a predator, weather, or human disturbance, she will nest again. Pheasants are like ducks that way; they will renest until they produce a brood. However, if the hen successfully hatches a brood and some chicks are lost to cool, wet weather, or predation, momma's energy is devoted to raising what's left of her young, not renesting.

Even if the entire brood is wiped out, the hen's obligation of hatching her eggs has been fulfilled, and she will not reproduce until the following year.

Because chicks of varying size are seen in late summer and early fall, some people trust they're seeing the fruits of multiple reproductive efforts, or different-aged broods from the same hen.

Not so.

To better understand, take the unlucky hen, for example, that loses her nest June 20 to a hungry fox. She renests July 1, but her eggs again fall prey to disaster on July 15. But, finally, on the third attempt, a brood is hatched, and the hen has completed her mission for the year. This new brood, when spotted by passersby in mid- to late August, will appear much smaller than those chicks hatched by other females 30-40 days earlier.

Lowell Trip, North Dakota Game and Fish Department upland game biologist, sums up the hen pheasant's annual trials with: "The female concentrates solely on getting those eggs hatched, and once she does, her major responsibility is over. She will not lay another batch of eggs until the following spring ... if she makes it that long."

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